

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Executive – 23 September 2020**

### **Unitary Programme Delivery Funds**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts**

**Report Author: Alison North, Director Internal Operations**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that Government has indicated it would wish to see unitary solutions to all parts of England currently covered by two tiers of County and Districts. Therefore, the District Councils have been working on the development of a business case for the reform of local government which includes the creation of two new unitary Councils for Somerset – ‘Stronger Somerset’. On the 10<sup>th</sup> September Full Council approved this business case
- 1.2 During this period of time our continuing focus as a council has been the delivery of services to our residents and supporting our community through COVID and ongoing economic recovery work. It is clear from developing the business case that there are emerging work streams and resources required to continue to take the business case forward and prepare the Council for any transition into a unitary structure. This work is over and above our focus of service delivery and community support through COVID.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval for a supplementary budget to fund the emerging work streams and associated required resources to ensure that we can adequately and professionally meet the needs of the unitary associated work.

#### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Executive approve a supplementary budget of £249,000 funded from general reserves, for expenditure to provide resources and advice to the Council as it progresses the Stronger Somerset business case and prepares for transition.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Leader of the Council and/or the Chief Executive, to approve individual items of expenditure against the budget.

#### **3. Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 The requirements of responding to the unitary debate is over and above current service delivery work and COVID support. There is a risk the Council will not have capacity to deliver the response required to keep our residents as well informed as possible, that the Council will not be represented with the best professional expertise to

ensure we are able to enter into any transition period as strong as possible for our staff and residents. The resources funded by the supplementary budget will mitigate the risk.

#### **4. Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 To reach the Business Case for Stronger Somerset the District Councils have worked together to develop a model for the reform of local government including the creation of two new unitary Councils in Somerset. The proposals set out a significant change in the way that local government would work, to create a much more collaborative approach to service provision and driving improvements in Somerset, focussed on the needs of residents, communities and businesses.
- 4.2 For the Council to continue to play a strong professional role and enable us as sovereign council to move forward with the new business case additional resources will be required in the areas of, finance, legal and organisational design expertise. These resources will also be key to enabling us to prepare well for the transition into a new unitary structure, work which is over and above day to day delivery and COVID community recovery support.
- 4.3 In addition we will need to keep residents informed up to the point where a bid is selected by the secretary of state. Additional resources in Communications and public affairs will ensure senior officers have the support they need to make arguments and cases as well as potential back fill should the workstream carry on for a longer period of time.
- 4.4 The supplementary budget requested is for the period of time up to the Secretary of States anticipated decision point of December 2020. Full transition and programme costs will be covered by which ever business case the Secretary of State is minded to support.

#### **5. Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 Direct and indirect link on all Corporate Strategy ensuring that our priorities are continued to be delivered for our community through a period of local government reform debate and change.

#### **6. Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 This supplementary budget will provide additional resources to ensure that senior officers are able to perform to the highest professional standard to ensure that the interests of residents and staff are fairly taken forward.
- 6.2 Procurement of resources and advice will be done within the Councils financial procedure rules and subject to procurement process.
- 6.3 Expenditure of the supplementary budget will be in agreement with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. Any unspent budget will be returned to General Reserves.

#### **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Nor applicable to this report

## **8. Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 Not applicable to this report

## **9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

9.1 Not applicable to this report

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

10.1 Not applicable to this report

## **11. Social Value Implications**

11.1 Not applicable to this report

## **12. Partnership Implications**

12.1 We will be working in partnership with all of the councils in the County as and when it is required. All of the partners will be developing budgets to support this type of proposal.

## **13. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

13.1 Not applicable to this report

## **14. Asset Management Implications**

14.1 Not applicable to this report

## **15 Data Protection Implications**

15.1 Not applicable to this report

## **16 Consultation Implications (if any)**

16.1 Not applicable to this report

## **17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)**

17.1 Not applicable to this report

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc**

### **Contact Officers**

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